

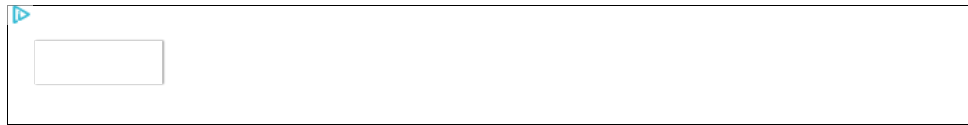


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The Washington Post

Biden faces new border emergency in Texas, where thousands of Haitian migrants are stuck under bridge



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DEL RIO, Texas —Thousands of Haitian migrants who have crossed the Rio Grande over the past 48 hours are sleeping outdoors under a border bridge in south Texas, creating a humanitarian emergency and a logistical challenge U.S. agents describe as unprecedented.



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what's this?

Authorities in Del Rio, Tex., say more than 8,000 migrants have arrived at the impromptu camp, and they are expecting thousands more in the coming days. Images of the bridge site show dense crowds, including families and small children, and deteriorating sanitary conditions.

The sudden influx has presented the Biden administration with a new border emergency at a time when illegal border crossings have reached a 20-year high and Homeland Security officials are straining to accommodate and resettle more than 60,000 Afghan evacuees.

The migrants arriving to Del Rio appear to be part of a larger wave of Haitians heading north, many of whom arrived in Brazil and other South American nations after the 2010 earthquake. They are on the move again, embarking on a grueling, dangerous journey to the United States with smuggling organizations managing the trip, according to border authorities and refugees groups.

More than 29,000 Haitians have arrived over the past 11 months, the latest Customs and Border Protection figures show, including some in mixed-nationality families whose children were born in

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They have trekked through the jungles of Central America, navigated migrant camps and criminal gangs in Central America and dodged border guards and troops along the highways of southern Mexico. Many say the economic toll of the pandemic pushed them to leave, while others say a more-welcoming U.S. administration has offered them a fleeting opportunity to reach the United States.

The Biden administration has curtailed deportation flights to Haiti after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July and a 7.2-magnitude earthquake Aug. 14 that killed more than 2,000. And the Department of Homeland Security has extended temporary protected status, or TPS, eligibility for Haitians, a measure that allows Haitians living in the United States without legal status to qualify for provisional residency and avoid deportation.

[Thousands of migrants overwhelm Colombian coastal town]

How many more may arrive in the next few days is unclear. CBP is scrambling to send additional agents to Del Rio to help process the migrants, issuing them numbers as they queue up to be formally apprehended, the first step in applying for asylum or another form of U.S. protection. Most of the migrants are likely to be released into the United States with a notice to appear in court at a future date.

"The Border Patrol is increasing its manpower in the Del Rio Sector and coordinating efforts within DHS and other relevant federal, state and local partners to immediately address the current level of migrant encounters and to facilitate a safe, humane and orderly process," CBP said in a statement. "To prevent injuries from heat-related illness, the shaded area underneath Del Rio International Bridge is serving as a temporary staging site while migrants wait to be taken into USBP custody."

U.S. agents say some migrants are wading back and forth across the river into Mexico to buy meals and supplies, and street vendors from Mexico have also wandered over to sell food inside the camp.

CBP said it is providing drinking water, towels and other provisions to the site, but one agent in the Del Rio Sector said sanitary conditions are poor. There are 20 portable toilets at the site, according to Jon Anfinson, the top Border Patrol union official in the Del Rio Sector.

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"We're scrambling to bring every resource we can, but it's a logistical nightmare," he said. "We're pulling agents from across the country to help, but they're not going to be there today, and we're just trying to keep heads above water."

Families with small children are given priority, Anfinson said, in order to move them out of the bridge area as soon as possible.

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The Biden administration says it will continue to use its emergency authorities under Title 42 of the U.S. public health code to rapidly return or “expel” migrants. But Mexican authorities have declined to take back Haitians in recent months.

The Biden administration is also contending with a series of new court orders over its border policies. On Thursday U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan in the District of Columbia blocked the Biden administration from using Title 42 to expel migrant families, though he stayed the order for 14 days. The percentage of families returned under Title 42 has been declining in recent months; in August authorities used it on just 19 percent of the more than 86,000 family members taken into custody.

The Supreme Court also said last month that the Biden administration must restart a Trump administration program that requires asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their claims are adjudicated in U.S. courts.

The Del Rio border sector has been among the busiest for illegal crossings in recent months as thousands of Haitians, Cubans, Venezuelans and Hondurans climb down from the limestone bluffs on the Mexican side to wade across the Rio Grande.

The river is only ankle-deep right now at popular crossing points, Anfinen said.

Del Rio Mayor Bruno “Ralph” Lozano (D) said the size of the group has increased steadily to more than 8,200 people. “I thought the worst-case scenario was having a couple people, maybe 150 people roaming the streets,” said Lozano, who warned the Biden administration in a February video that his community needed more federal support to cope with a surge in crossings.

“Although I foreshadowed a worst-case scenario, this is probably a worse case of worst-case scenarios,” he said. “I need the administration to recognize that there is a border crisis happening in real time right now and it has dire consequences on security, health and safety.”

In recent months, the city has been a testing ground for Gov. Greg Abbott’s most aggressive security plans, including charging migrants with state crimes such as trespassing.

Val Verde County, which includes Del Rio, went for President Donald Trump in 2020, voting for a Republican at the top of the ticket for the first time in decades.

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Val Verde County received state funding and hundreds of Texas state troopers in recent months to help Border Patrol agents. At one point this summer, then-sector chief Austin Skero had just four agents patrolling more than 40 miles of river, with officials tied up processing more than 1,000 migrants a day.

Haitian, Venezuelan and Cuban migrants often say they prefer to cross in the Del Rio area because of its reputation as comparatively safer than the Rio Grande Valley downriver.

Human rights activists have long forecast that trouble in the Mexican border cities of Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña would result in mass migration. While the route is attractive to migrants who can pay a bit more, these communities lack the aid infrastructure and local government support that exists in Mexican cities elsewhere.

[U.S. border authorities stopped more than 200,000 migrants in August, latest CBP data shows]

Many of the migrants arrived to the border on buses that appear to be part of a large smuggling operation, Lozano said. "It just sounds like there's an off-grid bus system that's not registered with the Mexican government that are driving these individuals north," he said.

Some Del Rio residents, particularly those living along the river and on ranches, have raised alarms in recent months about the large groups of migrants appearing on their properties.

The mayor said his city and the migrants are both victims, suffering the consequences of federal policy decisions that fail to address the realities on the ground in border communities.

"You have a favela that has been established overnight with individuals who are destitute," Lozano said. "Border Patrol is doing their best to process these people, but the Del Rio Sector is 240 miles wide. If the attention is given here to these 8,000 people, that opens up a big question: Who's watching the rest of the sector?"

Miroff reported from Washington. Maria Sacchetti contributed to this report.

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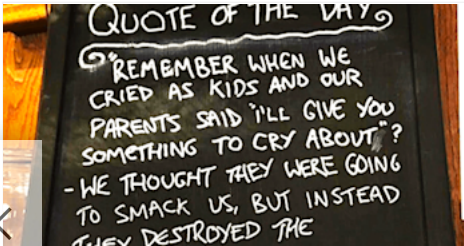
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© Go Nakamura/Reuters Asylum-seeking migrants rest in the shade Sept. 15 under the International Bridge in Del Rio, Tex.

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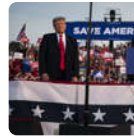
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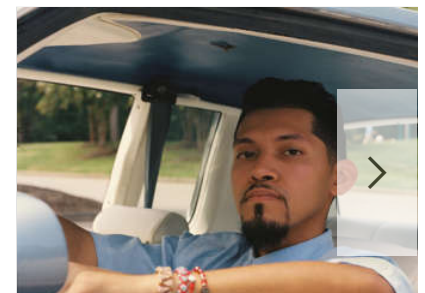
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but an assault from within, says Pelosi

Nancy Pelosi, House speaker of the US Congress, has likened the 6 January insurrection fomented by Donald Trump to 9/11, saying one had been an assault on US democracy from within and the other from the outside. She also claimed

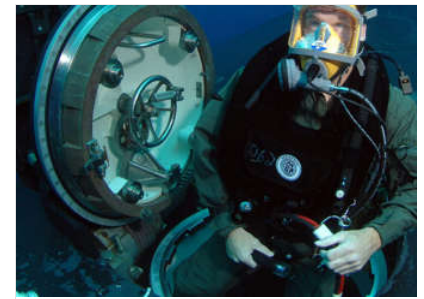
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